



5-2003

General educators' satisfaction with the Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Sherry Lynn Dunham

Recommended Citation

Dunham, Sherry Lynn, "General educators' satisfaction with the Individualized Education Program (IEP). " Master's Thesis, University of Tennessee, 2003.
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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Sherry Lynn Dunham entitled "General educators' satisfaction with the Individualized Education Program (IEP)." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Education.

Sherry Bell, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:

Dixie L. Thompson

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Sherry L. Dunham entitled "General Educators' Satisfaction With the Individualized Education Program (IEP)." I have examined the final paper copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Education.

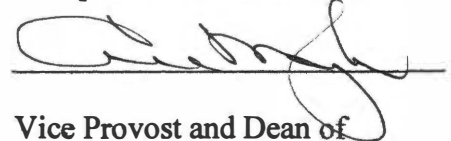

Sherry M. Bell, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and
recommend its acceptance:





Acceptance for the Council



Vice Provost and Dean of
Graduate Studies

Thesis
2003
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**General Educators' Satisfaction
With
the Individualized Education Program (IEP)**

**A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Science
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville**

**Sherry L. Dunham
May 2003**

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine general educators' satisfaction with their role in the Individualized Education Program (IEP). One hundred twenty seven general educators in a small rural community in Eastern Tennessee responded to a survey. The survey was modified slightly from studies by Stokes (2002) and Menlove (1999). General education teachers in grades K-8 reported being moderately satisfied with the IEP process with the lowest level of satisfaction on the value of the student's input. High school teachers reported a lower level of satisfaction with the IEP process overall and the lowest satisfaction level again was the input of the student.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

As a special educator, I have concerns that general educators do not feel comfortable including students with disabilities into general educational activities. A recent event in the school in which I teach exemplifies this concern. A group of general education teachers presented a note to the parents of special education students explaining why these students were not invited to attend a field trip. The note indicated that the field trip correlated with state curriculum standards being taught in their classes, and because the special education students were not taking part in the curriculum, they were to be left behind. The field trip was to a state park and the objective was to identify different plants. However, I believed that the special education students would also benefit from the field trip. Because of this and similar incidents, I believe it is important to examine the attitudes of general education teachers toward special education.

Special education and general education teachers historically have been piloted by two different sets of disciplines. The general education teacher must insure that the state curriculum standards for his/her subject or grade level are met while the special education teacher is to teach goals and objectives and use methods specified in the Individual Education Program (IEP). In some schools, special education students are still taught in separate classrooms with separate curriculum, despite efforts at the federal level to expose special education students to the general curriculum.

What will help dissolve differences between general education and special education and move toward including students with disabilities into the general

educational program? Because the IEP documents the curriculum for special education students, it should be helpful to begin by examining the IEP development process. Many general educators have expressed dissatisfaction with or a lack of understanding of the IEP process. This study will examine the satisfaction of the general education teacher with the educational process of individuals with disabilities, specifically the Individual Education Program (IEP).

Literature Review

Over time, society's perspective in dealing with persons with disabilities has evolved. Once persons with disabilities were thought of as a menace to society who should be disposed of. If they did not die in their young years, some parents abandoned them to the streets to beg for a living. Other parents were told by doctors to institutionalize their child if he/she was mentally retarded. In 2003, many people with disabilities work and/or go to school with their non-disabled peers.

Special Education in the United States began in the mid-1800's with grants from the federal government for "asylums for the deaf and the dumb and to promote education of the blind" (Packard & Packard, 2002, p.1). After these early efforts, there was limited involvement from the federal government of students with disabilities and public education for many years (Packard & Packard, 2002). In 1958, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed Public Law 85-926, which provided financial support for the training of leadership personnel in teaching children with mental retardation. Congress expanded this law in 1963 to include grants to train teachers and researchers at the college level to expand the knowledge of different disabilities (Packard & Packard, 2002). Thus,

involvement of the federal government was reintroduced in the education of students with disabilities.

Historically, special education and general education teachers have participated in two different curricula, which separated teachers, and isolated and categorized students (Wood, 1998). Over the last few decades, there has been a shift from segregated education of special and general education students to a “state of social belonging and challenge in a mainstream social context” (Ford, Davern, & Schnorr, 2001 p. 214). Before 1997, the participation of a teacher in the individual education program (IEP) was required; however, participation of a general education teacher, per se, was often ignored.

Since the passing of Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) (Smith 1990), the IEP is considered the most significant document ever proposed to monitor compliance of an education law. The IEP is the individualized instructional plan written to ensure adequate educational opportunities to students with disabilities. It is a plan that involves parents, professionals, and sometimes the student to develop a unique response to the student’s individual needs. However, initially the federal regulation did not specify if the teacher participant should be a special education teacher or a regular education teacher. Many IEPs were developed without the input of the regular education teacher before the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 1997 (IDEA ’97) (National Association of State Directors of Special Education Directors; NASDAE, 1998). With the reauthorization of IDEA ’97, federal regulations mandated that a general education teacher be present during the IEP meeting. This requirement states that students with disabilities have access to the core

curriculum. Thus, involvement of a general educator and access to the regular curriculum are emphasized in current law (NASDAE, 1998; Smith, 1990; Smith, 2000).

Public Law 94-142 also requires that students with disabilities be integrated into general education classes in order to be placed in the least restrictive environment possible to meet their needs (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). Smith (2000) noted that the goal of the IEP is to involve many participants in developing a comprehensive, free, and appropriate education. The variety of participants in the IEP process increases the number of professionals available to deliver needed support and guidance. According to Wood (1998), professionals participating in the IEP committee are there to deliver their knowledge and their specialized skills in representing their particular disciplines.

Prior to 1997, integration of special education students with non-disabled peers was frequently not emphasized in public education, even though there was support for the practice. With the changes in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA '97), there is more emphasis on including disabled students with general education students as much as possible --to allow them to become productive adults upon the completion of their formal education. General education teachers are expected to become a part of the IEP team to achieve these goals for all children (Huefner, 2000). Students with disabilities are to have access to the general education curriculum under the revisions to the law. Access to the general curriculum is essential if students with disabilities are to participate in the standards-based movement. Just assigning an aide and placing the student in the general education classroom does not meet the needs and accommodations required by the law (Fisher & Frev, 2001).

According to Wood (1998), “Just as animals claim, enhance, and protect their territories, so do disciplines assume ownership of particular bodies of knowledge, skills, or modes of intervention and, once established, promote and defend their turfs” (p. 182). For this reason educators may be hesitant to role change and to submit to new collaborative arrangements. Professionals may feel that their usefulness is threatened and their role descriptions may become blurred when roles are changed. Hence, it is critical to review the responsibilities of special and general educators to promote acceptance and to successfully implement inclusion. Cooperation in the inclusive process is needed to break down the existing roles of the professionals to maximize proficiency (Wood, 1998). Inclusion of students with disabilities requires a group effort with effective communication between special educators and general educators but neither may have been trained for this relationship. General education teachers are being asked to increase responsibilities for students with disabilities without the preparation or support system needed (Martin & Williams, 1999).

For inclusion to be most effective, all professionals responsible for the success must be ready and willing to accept the principles and demands of the process (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). These principles and demands include the teaching of students with disabilities as well as active involvement in the IEP process. Once all have accepted the principles and demands of the IEP process, a dynamic educational program for the individual student can be developed. With all participants in attendance, the team can focus on a description of the student’s strengths and weaknesses in different settings, including the current educational placement (Smith, 2000). This perspective allows all professionals involved to share the responsibility of educating children with disabilities.

With this shared responsibility, the special and general educational programming will concentrate more on the identified goals of the IEP (Smith, 2000). If general educators are to share the responsibility of educating certain students with disabilities, it is important to incorporate their input into an IEP meeting (Stokes, 2002).

In addition to being a necessary member of the IEP team, general educators are to help plan and teach children with disabilities (Stokes, 2002). The general educator brings to the IEP meeting the information needed for a student to be successful in the regular educational class. This information helps the team understand why the disabilities prevent student participation in the overall educational setting. This knowledge is also helpful if the parents change their mind about the placement of their child and challenge the IEP team decision (Huefner, 2000). IEPs must reflect the standard education curriculum and outline goals for both the general and special educational programs. The goals and objectives should be written to reflect the requirements needed to complete the general education curriculum. The IEP must also state how the disability will affect student involvement in the regular classroom. Modifications and accommodations are to be addressed by the IEP team and not just the special educator (Stokes, 2002).

Special educators are sometimes placed into a “field of dreams” created by the development of legislation, regulations, and mandates that are to be put into practice in the school setting with limited time and resources (Menlove, Hudson, and Suter, 2001, p. 28). Although there are reasons for these practices and expectations, what actually happens in the school setting may be a different matter. For example, IDEA ‘97 mandates that the general education teacher participate in the IEP development process; however, this is rarely the case according to Menlove, Hudson, and Suter (2001).

According to Smith (1990), studies show that the potential input of the general education teacher is not realized in the IEP process. The lack of this realization may be attributed, in part, to the communication between the special education and the general education teacher. Also, when the general education teachers do participate in the IEP meeting, they often do so in a superficial manner (Smith, 1990). During pre-meeting surveys, Gilliam and Coleman (1981) found that the general education teacher ranked high among IEP participants as an essential member. This is in contrast to the post meeting surveys where they were ranked low on their contribution and influences.

General Educators' Satisfaction with the IEP Process

Menlove (1999) conducted a survey to determine satisfaction levels of the general education teacher about the IEP process. The survey consistently reported low levels of satisfaction with the IEP development process among general educators. The satisfaction level decreased as the students' age increased. High school teachers were the least satisfied with the IEP development process (Menlove et al., 2001).

A follow-up session was conducted with a focus group of general educators consisting of two elementary-level teachers, one middle school teacher, and one high school teacher. The teachers were asked to comment on why they were not satisfied with the IEP process and what could be done to improve their satisfaction with the process. The teachers were able to provide feedback regarding the IEP development process and reasons of dissatisfaction (Menlove et al., 2001). The reasons were grouped into five areas: team connection, time, preparation, training, and IEP relevance. These issues will be addressed in the following sections of this paper. Menlove and colleagues indicate that general educators did not feel connected to the IEP team or the IEP developmental

process. They reported that general educators feel that sometimes they are not a part of the decision making process because the decisions are made before the meeting and they just sign and leave. General educators also feel that their input is not always valued by other team members during the IEP process and that the IEP meeting is the special education teacher's meeting rather than a team meeting. Therefore, differing opinions are never expressed. Many times the input of the general educators is asked after the meeting or not at all. However, general education teachers noted that in the past two years special education teachers had begun to ask for more input from them.

A potential solution for increasing the involvement of the general educators in the IEP process would be for the special educator to become more supportive of the general educator. In order for the needs of the students to be served, special educators must provide support to general educators in order to work as an effective collaborative team. Special education teachers could send a copy of the agenda to general educators with potential questions they would like to be answered by the general educators. General educators have a more positive attitude toward the IEP development process when they receive support and encouragement from the special educator (Menlove et al., 2001).

Time constraints are another frustrating issue for the general educator. They are particularly concerned with the amount of time spent in the IEP meetings and the amount of paperwork involved. General education teachers have suggested that IEP meetings should be scheduled during the regular contract day. Some possible solutions would be to schedule the IEP meeting in the general educators' classrooms and to plan the meeting during their planning time. Some other suggestions would require funding commitments from the district administrators. For example, provide transportation and childcare for

the parents while scheduling all IEP meetings on the same day and providing a substitute for the teachers (Menlove et al., 2001).

The third aspect of concern for general education teachers was the preparation issue. General educators expressed concerns that the special education teachers were unprepared and not well organized and indicated they did not know what was expected of them in the IEP meeting. A suggested solution was to adopt Vermont's family-centered IEP process. Blank IEP forms are sent to each member of the team with the prior written notice. These forms can be used to collect thoughts and suggestions before the meeting begins. This could leave more time in the meeting for collaboration (Menlove et al., 2001).

Since general education teachers are required to attend the IEP meetings and become an active member of the team, they have expressed a need for training in developing and understanding the IEP process. They specifically requested training in the areas of the development process, terms and forms, documenting the student's progress in regards to the goals and objectives, and resources available to link the student needs to the goals and objectives (Menlove et al., 2001).

The last concern expressed by the general education teachers is that of IEP relevance. General educators indicated that the process did not consider the problems in the general education classrooms. Therefore, they did not feel the IEP would benefit the student in the (general education) classrooms. The general educators believed the IEP was designed to strengthen special education and not general education. The general educators stated they wanted more participation in developing realistic goals that relate to the (general education) curriculum. They wanted to be able to initiate IEP goals,

objectives, and modifications. Providing copies of the goals and objectives to general educators could enhance the general educators' ability to meet the individual student's need. More in-service was desired to enhance development and implementation of an IEP (Menlove et al., 2001).

Stokes (2002) surveyed general educators in a small system in a rural southeastern state, using a variation of the Menlove survey. In contrast to Menlove's findings, Stokes found that general educators' attitudes concerning the IEP process were generally positive. The general educators indicated that the meetings were scheduled at convenient times and that there was plenty of time allotted for the meeting. The general educators surveyed were less satisfied with their role as members of the IEP team. They reported they lacked the training to address special education issues that may hinder the way a student learns. The general education teachers understood the forms and that the forms were an important part of the IEP process. They reported that the team was a collaborative unit where all participants' input was important. Studies of this nature can provide valuable information for teacher preparation at the pre-service and in-service levels. Determining the general educators' attitude toward the IEP process should help in the implementation of a comprehensive program where the students will benefit from a collaborative team (Stokes, 2002).

Statement of Problem and Purpose

General educators play an essential role in providing services to special education students who are required to be educated in the least restrictive environment. All teachers involved with the education of the student with disabilities should be trained to work with these students; in addition, increased communication between the special and

general educators is needed. In order for general education teachers to successfully participate in the IEP process, they must understand the IEP development process, the IEP forms and terms, how to document the students' progress as related to the goals and objectives, and how to implement the programs into the general education class (Menlove et al., 2001). The purpose of this paper is to determine the satisfaction of general education teachers within a rural school district in East Tennessee with their role in the IEP development process.

Research Questions

1. To what extent do general educators report feeling satisfied with the IEP process?
2. What is the relationship between general educators' satisfaction with the IEP process and the grade they teach, the number of years taught, and the number of special education courses taken?
3. Specifically, to what extent do general education teachers report satisfaction with:
 - ☐ Team connection
 - ☐ Time involved in the IEP process
 - ☐ Preparation
 - ☐ Training
 - ☐ Relevance of the IEP?
4. What factors do general educators identify as (a) contributing to the IEP process and (b) hindering the IEP process?

CHAPTER 2

Method

Participants

Participants were general education teachers from 11 schools in a small rural county school system in a southeastern state. All of the schools serve students with mild disabilities in resource classes while only five of the schools have classes serving students with more severe disabilities. Sixty-two of the recipients taught grades K-5, 40 taught grades 6-8, and 25 taught grades 9-12. Sixty-three% of the schools receive Title I funding and the population is 95% Caucasian. The area is socio-economically depressed and is isolated from any urban area.

Instrumentation

A survey, *General Education Teacher's' Satisfaction with the IEP Meeting* (Stokes, 2002) was modified slightly and administered to assess general education teachers' attitudes concerning the IEP development process. The Stokes survey was adapted from Menlove's survey as part of a Utah State Office of Education study in 1999. Seventeen statements on the survey address general education teachers' satisfaction with their role in the IEP process. Due to restriction of range noted in the Stokes study, the response choices were expanded from a four to a five point scale for this study. Teachers were asked to rate fifteen Likert-scale statements with the following choices: Very Satisfied, Satisfied, Not Too Satisfied, Really Not Satisfied, and No Opinion. Responses on the survey are given a score of 1 to 5; the higher the score indicated, the more positive response. Three demographic items (grade level taught, number of years taught, and

number of special education courses taken) are also included. Finally, two open-ended questions ask teachers to name variables that make and do not make the IEP process positive and productive. Reliability of the *General Education Teachers' Satisfaction with the IEP Meeting Survey* appears to be adequate for research purposes; Stokes (2002) reported an internal consistency reliability of .95; an alpha coefficient of .92 indicates strong internal reliability for the five-point response format used in this study. See Appendix for a copy of the complete survey.

Data Collection

The survey was distributed to 390 general education teachers who attended IEP meetings during the past year. The surveys were sent through the interschool mail to each of the teachers with a brief letter of introduction and an explanation of purpose. Included in the letter was a request for completion and return to the researcher. One hundred twenty-seven surveys were completed for a return rate of 32%. Anonymity was maintained.

CHAPTER 3

Results

Tables 1 and 2 present demographic information describing the respondents. Grade level information (i.e., K-5, 6-8, and 9-12) is provided in Table 1 Information about the teaching experience and the number of special education courses taken is provided in Table 2. The completed surveys were tallied and presented descriptively (i.e., means and standard deviations for each Likert-scale item) in Table 3.

Sixty-two K-5 teachers (48.8%); 40 grades 6-8 teachers (31.5%) and 25 9-12 teachers (19.7%) completed the survey. Thirty-one respondents taught one to five years for a total of 24.4%. Forty-nine respondents taught six -16 years for a total of 38.6% and 46 of the respondents taught 16 years or more for a total of 36.2%. The mean number of

Table 1. *Grade Level Taught by General Educators Responding to General Education Teacher's Satisfaction with the IEP-Team Meeting Survey*

Grade Level	Frequency Responses	Percentage
K-5	62	48.8
6-8	40	31.5
9-12	25	19.7
Total	127	100

Table 2. Years Taught and Number of Special Education Courses Taken by General Educators Responding to General Education Teacher's Satisfaction with the IEP-Team Meeting Survey

<i>Survey Question</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>1. How many years taught?</i>	<i>1-5</i>	<i>31</i>	<i>24.4</i>
	<i>6-15</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>38.6</i>
	<i>16-38</i>	<i>46</i>	<i>36.2</i>
<i>2. How many Special Education Courses taken</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>18.9</i>
	<i>1</i>	<i>32</i>	<i>26.2</i>
	<i>2</i>	<i>29</i>	<i>23.8</i>
	<i>3</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>12.3</i>
	<i>4+</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>18.8</i>

Table 3. *General Educators' Satisfaction with the IEP Team Meeting Process.*

<i>Research Question</i>	<i>Survey Question</i>	<i>Number of responses</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>
To what extent do general education teachers report satisfaction with team connection?	5	126	3.92	1.07
	11	127	3.73	1.10
	12	124	2.90	1.30
	14	127	3.63	1.02
	15	127	3.45	1.25
	17	126	3.57	.991
To what extent do general education teachers report satisfaction with time involved in the IEP process?	3	127	3.51	1.02
	4	127	3.63	1.06
To what extent do general education teachers report satisfaction with preparation?	6	127	3.85	.900
	7	127	3.59	.962
To what extent do general education teachers report satisfaction with training?	8	127	3.15	1.07
	9	127	3.53	1.04
	10	127	3.70	.992
To what extent do general education teachers report satisfaction with relevance of the IEP?	13	127	3.36	1.07
	16	127	3.55	1.10

years taught was 12.6 years. There was a range of 0-15 special education courses taken with a mean of 2.2 years.

Means and standard deviations for each of the Likert-scale items are presented in Table 3. The items are grouped under the themes: team connection, time involved in the IEP process, preparation, training, and relevance of the IEP. Means ranged from 2.90 (question 12- In IEP meetings, the student's input is valued) to 3.92 (question 5-The purpose of the meetings is clear to me) on a Likert-scale of 1 to 5. Generally, item means suggest moderate satisfaction; only one was below 3.0. The overall mean of the scale was 3.54 and the mean for Item 17 ("Overall I feel satisfied with my role in the IEP process") was 3.57

A 3 X 2 factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine if there are any significant differences on the survey Total score based on grade level, number of years teaching experience and number of special education courses taken by the respondents. No significant differences were noted based on the number of years taught and the number special education courses taken ($p > .05$). Because the ANOVA indicated a significant difference in the Total score based on grade level taught [$F(2, 121) = 3.17, p < .05$], three separate independent t test were conducted. The t tests indicated significant differences on Total score between K-5 teachers and high school teachers ($p = .01$) and between 6-8 teachers and high school teachers ($p = .02$). No significant differences in Total score were indicated for K-5 versus 6-8 teachers.

Two open-ended questions were asked on the survey:

1. What factors make the IEP process positive and productive?
2. What factors do not make the IEP process positive and productive?

A variety of answers were received; Table 4 gives the three most frequent responses to question number 1 and Table 5 gives the three most frequent responses to question number 2. Responses are broken down by grade levels K-5, 6-8, and 9-12.

Table 4. *Three Most Frequent Reasons that Make the IEP Process Positive and Productive*

<i>Grades Taught</i>	<i>Responses</i>
K-5	All participants work together to form a team
	All work together to meet the student's needs.
	The special education teacher is prepared.
6-8	All participants work together to form a team
	The meeting is structured and organized.
	All work together to meet the student's needs.
9-12	Staff works together to form a team and make a plan.
	Parents are present and give input.
	All work together to meet the student's needs.

Table 5. *Three Most Frequent Reasons that Do Not Make the IEP Process Positive and Productive.*

<i>Grades Taught</i>	<i>Responses</i>
K-5	Teachers do not have any input in meeting.
	Plans are made before the meeting begins.
	Meeting is held during planning time or during class time, takes teacher away from students.
6-8	Parents do not show up and when they do they have too much input.
	Teachers do not have adequate training to deal with special education students in the classroom.
	Teachers do not have any input in meeting.
9-12	Plans are made before the meeting begins.
	There is too much paperwork.
	Meeting is schedule at an inconvenient time.
	The process is making the students lazy.
	The teacher's input is not valued.

CHAPTER 4

Discussion

To what extent do general educators report feeling satisfied with the IEP process? Results of this study indicate that general education teachers in grades K-8 are relatively satisfied with the IEP process. The overall mean response of 3.54 indicates a moderate level of satisfaction overall. In addition, the mean for Item #17 ("Overall I feel satisfied with my role in the IEP process") was 3.57. The highest mean on the survey was "The purpose of the meeting is clear to me" with a mean of 3.92 and the item on the survey with the lowest mean was "In IEP meetings, the students input is valued" with a mean of 2.90.

What is the relationship between general educators' satisfaction with the IEP process and the grade they teach, the number of years taught, and the number of special education courses taken? No differences in satisfaction were indicated based on number of years taught and number of special education courses taken. However, both elementary (K-5) and middle school (6-8) teachers reported significantly higher satisfaction, based on the survey Total score, than did high school (9-12) teachers. General educators in the K-8 grade levels reported being fairly satisfied with the IEP process but the high school teachers reported a lower level of satisfaction. These results differed from those found by Stokes study (2002). However, Menlove (1999) found similar results: decreased satisfaction levels as the students progressed in age.

Specifically, to what extent do general education teachers report satisfaction with:

- Team connection: Means on the team connection items ranged from 2.90 to 3.92, four of the six having means above 3.5, suggesting moderately high satisfaction. The item with the highest mean was “The purpose of the meetings is clear to me” while the lowest mean was obtained for “In IEP meetings, the student’s input is valued.”
- Time involved in the IEP process: Means on the time involved in the IEP process items suggested moderately high satisfaction. “There is enough time allowed for the IEP meeting” received a mean of 3.63. “IEP meetings are held at a convenient time & location” received a mean of 3.51.
- Preparation: Means on the preparation items suggested moderately high satisfaction. “IEP team members are prepared ahead of time” received a mean of 3.85. “I feel prepared to carry out my role as an IEP team member” received a mean of 3.59.
- Training: Means on the training items ranged from 3.15 to 3.70; two of the three items having means above 3.5, suggesting moderately high satisfaction. The item with the highest mean was “The IEP paperwork is an important part of the IEP process” while the lowest mean was obtained for “I have received adequate training for my role as an IEP team member.”
- Relevance of the IEP: Means on the relevance of the IEP items suggested moderately high satisfaction. “IEP decisions made are discussed and

decided together” received a mean of 3.55. “In my opinion, IEPs enhance student learning” received a mean of 3.36.

What factors do general educators identify as (a) contributing to the IEP process and (b) hindering the IEP process?

When asked which factors make IEP teams positive and productive, general educators across all grade levels gave similar answers. The most common theme seemed to be that all participants worked together to form a team. Some specific answers were “There is cooperation, communication and respect among IEP members.” “Teachers, parents, and administrators working together for the benefit of the child.” Other answers reflected that guidance and preparation of the special education teacher are important, e.g., “Good special education teachers who are prepared”. Others suggested parental input and involvements are important, e.g., “Receive parental input, get to meet the parents face to face”.

In response to being asked, what factors make the IEP process NOT positive and productive, general educators across grade levels indicated that their input was not valued or that the decisions were made about the student before the meeting began. They also stated that many times students in special education became lazy and were presented with no challenge. A few teachers indicated that when the parents did attend the meetings they had too much input into how the student should receive their education. Some specific answers were “Parents demand performance and adherence from us while they are not taking responsibility or ask the child to take it.” “Parents have too much of a say when they are not educators.” “Parents telling whole life story.” “Parent input should be very limited!”

The general educators participants surveyed reported that the purpose of the meeting was made clear to them and that they were satisfied with their overall role in the IEP process. The high school teachers were generally less satisfied with the IEP process, but did report that the purpose of the meeting was made clear to them. Further examination of the issue of the IEP process at the high school level needs to be explored. Even though they high school teachers indicated they understood the purpose of the meeting, did they really appreciate the need?

The general education teacher participating in the survey reported being less satisfied with some aspects of their team connection to the IEP process. In the open-ended questions, many of them stated that the decisions were made before the meeting and they were there to simply occupy space and sign on the line. When they did express a concern or an idea, they were ignored and did not address their concerns. These issues could be addressed with more collaboration between the special education teacher and the general educator. Special education teachers would benefit from focusing on relating to the teachers that their concerns are important to the success of the IEP process and that they are valued members of the team. Special educators should listen to general educators, who understand what it takes for a student to be successful in the regular education classroom and could add very useful information and suggestions to the overall plan.

Several of the teachers surveyed stated that the student should have very little say because the meeting was for their best interest and many of the students have learned to be lazy. As for the parents, they reported that many parents do not attend the meetings and when they do, they want to give the child's life story, thus making the meeting

unnecessarily long. General educators need to develop an appreciation for the importance of parental and student input and why this input is emphasized in current law. To achieve this understanding, more adequate training must be added to the in-service programs. General educators in grades K-8 were relatively satisfied with the time required to attend IEP meetings. Some expressed a concern that when meetings were held during their planning time, this interfered with the only break they have all day. Surprisingly, many of them stated that the meetings were rushed and that more time should be allotted to develop a better plan. A possible solution to this problem would be to hold the meetings before and after school, or hold the meetings during parent-teacher conferencing, and be prepared with an agenda and all the paperwork in order. Menlove et al. (2001) suggested setting aside a day or days just to hold meetings; substitutes would be provided so that teachers could attend.

High school teachers reported less satisfaction with the time issue than did middle and elementary grade teachers. They reported that many times the meetings were scheduled during class time making it impossible for them to attend. Some indicated that even if the meeting was held during their planning time, they were not given enough notice to plan for the IEP meeting. When planning an IEP meeting at the high school level the schedule of the members involved should be considered and the notice should be given to the teacher the same day one would give it to the parents. Along with the notice, each teacher could receive an agenda to aid the teacher in planning for the meeting.

General educators expressed a need for more training. Their main concern was not having adequate training to carry on the role of a productive IEP team member. The

high school teachers did score this section slightly lower than the K-8 teachers. General education teachers play an important role in the IEP developmental process and they do need the training to work together as a productive team player. They need training in how to chart a student's progress on their goals and objectives, how to fill out and interpret the terms and forms, and how to set up a plan to implement the goals and objectives. A need for further training was also indicated in the studies by Stokes (2002) and Menlove et al. (2001).

Conclusions and generalizations from this study are limited to the small rural and Caucasian community; the responses may be biased by the circumstances under which they were administered (i.e., by a special education teacher in the system). Also, the return rate was relatively low (32%); a selection factor may affect generalization. Further research needs to be conducted with larger, more diverse populations in other parts of the state and nation.

This study did not include an examination of these questions by disability type, ranging from students with learning disabilities to those with severe cognitive disabilities, or the programs that serve the students. The participants in this study were from 11 schools; only five of those serve students with severe disabilities. All 11 serve students with mild disabilities. This study could be extended to address satisfaction with the IEP process, based on disability types.

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APPENDIX

General Education Teacher's Satisfaction With the IEP-Team Meeting

Please circle the grade level(s) that you teach and the appropriate responses that follow, reflecting on the IEP team meetings in which you have participated in the past two years.

K 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

VS = Very Satisfied
S = Satisfied
NTS = Not Too Satisfied
RNS = Really Not Satisfied
NO = No Opinion

1. How many years have you taught? _____
2. How many courses have you taken in special education? _____
3. IEP meetings are held at a convenient time & location. VS S NTS RNS NO
4. There is enough time allowed for the IEP meeting VS S NTS RNS NO
5. The purpose of the meetings is clear to me. VS S NTS RNS NO
6. IEP team members are prepared ahead of time. VS S NTS RNS NO
7. I feel prepared to carry out my role as an IEP team member. VS S NTS RNS NO
8. I have received adequate training for my role as an IEP
team member. VS S NTS RNS NO
9. I understand the terms and forms used in IEP team meetings. VS S NTS RNS NO
10. The IEP paperwork is an important part of the IEP process VS S NTS RNS NO
11. I feel that other team members value my input. VS S NTS RNS NO
12. In IEP meetings, the student's input is valued. VS S NTS RNS NO
13. In my opinion, IEPs enhance student learning. VS S NTS RNS NO
14. In my opinion, parents' input is used in making IEP decisions. VS S NTS RNS NO
15. In my opinion principals/administrators input is used in
making IEP decisions. VS S NTS RNS NO
16. IEP decisions made are discussed and decided together. VS S NTS RNS NO
17. Overall, I feel satisfied with my role in the IEP process. VS S NTS RNS NO

Please continue the survey on the back.

Please add comments to the next two questions.

18. What factors make the IEP process positive and productive?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

19. What factors do not make the IEP process positive and productive?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

Please add any additional comments at the bottom of the page.

VITA

Sherry Lynn Dunham was born in Nashville, Tennessee on June 18, 1955. She was raised in Nashville and Knoxville, Tennessee; being a minister's daughter, the family moved around quite a lot. She graduated from Carter High School in 1973 and graduated from Tennessee Wesleyan College with a degree in Elementary Education (K-8) in 1977. She married and has two sons. In 1998, she decided to pursue a special education degree and took a summer modified block in special education. In 2001, she took the second block in order to teach students with more severe disabilities. Sherry is currently teaching in a comprehensive special education classroom in a small rural community in Eastern Tennessee.

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